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SUBJECT: GERMANY/RUSSIA: LOST THAT LOVING FEELING?

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Classified By: Deputy Chief of Mission Greg Delawie for reasons 1.4. (b) and (c).

11. (C) Summary. German political decision- and opinion-makers are making a more sober assessment of Russia writ large, including its partnership with Germany and its trajectory. German officials describe themselves as the most avid supporters in Europe of the U.S. reset policy, but nearly a year after the Vice President's February Munich Security Conference speech, they still are asking how Germany can help improve relations with Russia. This lack of policy vision is reflected in a broader questioning of what type of partnership Germany has and wants with Russia, perhaps best exemplified by the decision to recall Berlin's ambassador to Moscow. Although traditionalists -- even in the MFA and Chancellery -- continue to stress Germany's historical, cultural, and economic ties with Russia, the overall political tone is "less romantic" toward Russia, in the words of one parliamentarian. This is largely due to Russian efforts to divide NATO and block movement on key treaties, to say nothing of the "overall stagnation" of Russian society and development. During a private roundtable hosted by Ambassador Murphy, members of Germany's Russia "brain trust" from the German Parliament, MFA, MOD, Chancellery, and think-tank community displayed little belief that they could influence Russian actions and saw assisting Russia's economic modernization as the only hope for one day seeing a "reliable international partner" in Russia. End Summary.

DEALING WITH RUSSIAN SECURITY PROPOSALS

12. (C) While recognizing that the Russian-proposed European Security Treaty (EST) and the related proposal in the NATO-Russia Council (NRC) are a joint assault to divide and weaken the West in the OSCE and NATO, Germany is reluctant to disregard either proposal for fear of alienating Russia further from European security structures (see reftel). According to MFA Deputy Political Director Pohl, both Russian proposals represent an attempt to "come to terms with the past 20 years," and freeze the current dynamics in Europe, specifically by "preventing further NATO enlargement and ensuring that whatever NATO does will not impinge on Russian security." The German government hopes that the Alliance and OSCE will engage with Russia on the key issues within the framework of existing albeit often not functioning agreements (such as CFE). Rather than creating new arrangements, we should attempt to make full use of existing agreements, according to the Chancellery Division Head for the Former Soviet Union and Eastern Europe Schulz.

13. (C) Germany agrees that the main forum for discussing the EST should remain the OSCE but sees value in discussing the two proposals in other forums. However, MFA officials admit they are scratching their heads on how to keep Russia engaged in the Corfu Process given the intense Russian dislike for the OSCE, according to the MFA Division Head for OSCE Affairs

Freischlader. Moreover, Berlin is questioning Moscow's interest in advancing cooperation in either multilateral forum following the Russian antics leading up to the NATO Foreign Ministerial and at the OSCE Ministerial. Put more bluntly, MFA Deputy Division Head for NATO Denecke declared that we often "have the misperception that Russia likes the idea of cooperation." Recognizing this very real Russian reluctance makes Berlin even more hesitant to disregard either proposal, and the MFA already has confirmed the Russian FM Lavrov will speak at the 2010 Munich Security Conference -- likely as the head of delegation and about the EST.

MOVING FORWARD WITH RUSSIA

14. (C) Berlin remains uncertain of how it can help the U.S. improve relations with Russia beyond reiterating time and again to Russian counterparts that Moscow should accept the U.S. reset policy. Moving beyond this message, German officials encourage the U.S. to continue engagement with human rights activists, focus on economic engagement, offer protocol tokens of goodwill, and redirect some aspects of the Russian proposals (the EST and the proposal delivered in the NRC) to CFE negotiations. Although Embassy contacts across the board encourage the U.S. to engage in Russia with human rights activists, small businesses, journalists, and so forth in addition to officials, they see little hope in Russia's domestic scene today, arguing that the situation has deteriorated over the past decade.

15. (C) The Russian society as a whole (economically, politically, and culturally) has entered a period of

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stagnation similar to the Brezhnev years, according to SPD Deputy Caucus Chairman Erler. Widespread agreement exists across the German policy community that the West only can hope to help Russia out of this quandary through economic engagement with the long-term goal that encouraging good governance, the rule of law, and so forth eventually will lead to broader developments. Although CDU Bundestag Member and MFA German-Russian Coordinator Schockenhoff remains upbeat that President Medvedev is reaching the future leaders of Russia, the German policy community overall appears pessimistic regarding Russia's domestic trajectory, and the MFA is "preparing for" the possible return of Putin to the presidency in 2012, something MFA contacts responsible for Russia view as highly likely.

16. (C) Moreover, Berlin has become increasingly frustrated with the lack of a positive Russian response to Washington's overtures. FDP Foreign Policy Spokesman Stinner openly voices his frustration, and MFA officials privately share that they too are dismayed by Moscow's lack of movement on key efforts to improve relations. Contacts are nearly unanimous in their view that the U.S. throwing a few protocol bones Russia's way would make Moscow a more tractable partner. While referring to it as emotional blackmail, Bundestag members stressed their belief that if Moscow saw it was viewed as an equal in DC, cooperation likely would improve. Specifically, Berlin awaits eagerly a follow-on treaty to START as they hope it will provide the impetus for moving forward on CFE negotiations. Parts of the Russian proposal in the NRC can be addressed through the CFE negotiations, according to Pohl.

GERMAN INTROSPECTION ON RUSSIA

17. (C) The MFA still appears uncertain of where their new FM will lead relations with Russia. Although FM Westerwelle has stressed continuity in the overall relationship, the MFA and other government organs are questioning how "special" or "strategic" the German-Russian partnership really is. Bundestag members such as CDU Foreign Affairs Committee Chairman Polenz and Greens Foreign Policy Spokeswoman Beck openly mock the idea, and argue that the relationship is

predominately economic. However, the West needs Russia on key policy issues (Iran, CFE, Afghanistan, etc.), so although Russia is worse off domestically, we need Moscow, according to many Bundestag members, the Chancellery, and MFA functional and regional offices. The more traditional approach to Russia remains strongly represented in the new MFA policy planning staff covering Russia, who stress how special Russia is and how special the Berlin-Moscow connection is. Although this camp appears to be in the minority, the policy planning staff normally has direct access to the highest levels of the ministry.

18. (C) The debate within official German circles already has taken an ugly turn with the policy planning staff openly criticizing the MFA functional and regional offices for "not getting Russia." For instance, the NATO, OSCE, and Russia offices argue that the West should not "do Moscow's work" by providing detailed counter-proposals on the EST or NRC proposal. Instead, Moscow should provide a workable and solid proposal in each forum. The MFA policy planning staff argues that such an approach is exactly the wrong tactic because Moscow wants to develop specific agreements jointly with partner countries. Of utmost importance, Russia should not feel like the Alliance or other OSCE members are ganging up against Moscow. Beyond sharply criticizing this viewpoint, Bundestag members including Schockenhoff argue that it may be best for the Alliance to come to terms before we enter negotiations with Russia. Perhaps the most interesting development in this internal struggle was the decision to recall German Ambassador to Moscow Schmidt for his "soft approach" on Russia, according to press reports. Although a replacement has not been named, MFA contacts confirm that current German NATO PermRep Brandenburg is under serious consideration.

COMMENT

19. (C) Recent negative Russian actions on human rights and frustration with developing the relationship beyond economic ties are causing officials to engage in a sober assessment of the relationship. Thus far, the conclusion appears to be that while Germany has a good rolodex of Russian contacts, Berlin has little ability to influence policy, and therefore lacks a truly strategic partnership in anything outside of trade and investment. Moreover, the traditional and more pessimistic or realistic approach currently under debate in official circles -- while interesting -- may have little real impact on overall policy but rather influence tactics. Both

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approaches recognize that cooperation with Russia is necessary on numerous fronts but disagree on whether the West should pre-coordinate. END COMMENT.
MURPHY